



Wahluke Unit

Fact Sheet • August 2002



FWS photo: William Radke

Unit Size

57,000 acres

History and Administration

Since 1943 the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has held title to the lands that make up this and all other units that became part of the Hanford Reach National Monument in 2000. From 1971 until 1999 this area was managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) for multiple public uses under a permit with DOE. In 1999 it became part of the Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge making the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the current primary land manager under a use permit with DOE.



1937 WPA photo: Louis Boeder

Address/Phone

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Location

The Wahluke Unit extends from the east side of the Columbia River, north to Saddle Mountains. It is bisected by state Highway 24. Prominent natural features include a portion of Wahluke Slope and Saddle Mountains, the White Bluffs, and large dune fields above the White Bluffs.

Habitats

Riparian and shrub-steppe habitats dominate, but striated basalt outcroppings and the 600-foot tall White Bluffs create additional habitats. Near the center of the unit is Wahluke Lakes (also known as WB-10 ponds), created and sustained by South Columbia Basin Irrigation District's canals.

Rare Plants

Rare plants found in this unit include: Geyer's milkvetch, desert dodder and newly discovered White Bluffs bladderpod, a federal candidate species for threatened and endangered listing.

Wildlife

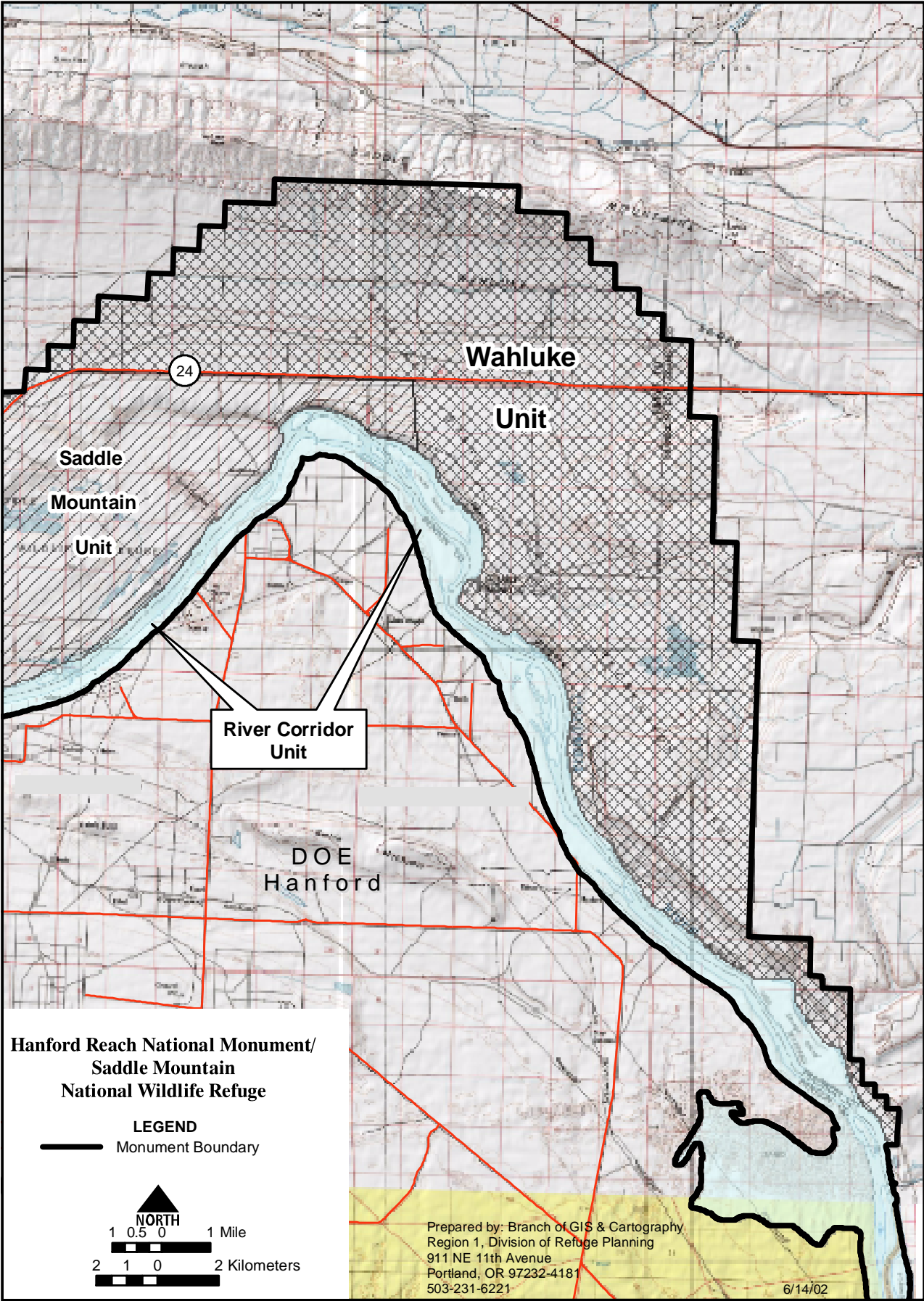
Red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds, marsh wrens and northern harriers are a few of the birds that use the cover and nesting sites found in dense stands of bulrushes and cattails. Horned larks and meadowlarks can easily be seen along roadsides and prairie falcons nest in the sheer bluffs. Herpetofauna include: tiger salamander, Great Basin spadefoot, sagebrush lizard, short-horned lizard and gopher snake. The lakes have populations of introduced fish such as carp, bass, sunfish, and panfish.

Public Uses

The Wahluke Unit has been open to the public since 1978 with day use allowed year-round. Current public uses include hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation, and photography. Vehicles and bicycles are permitted on designated roads only. Overnight use, camping, open fires, and off-road vehicle use are not allowed. Public facilities include the White Bluffs boat launch, additional river access sites, a scenic overlook, and a parking area with walking access to Wahluke Lake. No restrooms or potable water exist on the unit.

Cultural Resources

Deposition and erosion processes along the Columbia River channel provide information on the earliest known wildlife in the area including mastodon, camel, and ground sloth. For at least 8,000 years, the Saddle Mountains provided the ancestors of several Native American tribes with hunting and gathering opportunities as well as stone sources for toolmaking. The Wahluke Unit includes part of the historic White Bluffs Road and river crossing which by 1860 was one of the busiest crossroads in Washington Territory. White Bluffs landing log cabin is the earliest (1890s) standing structure remaining in the Monument.



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